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BIRDS HELP FARMERS, ORCHARDISTS BY REDUCING INSECT DEPREDATIONS

The birds of North America are important not only because they are objects of enjoyment to those who like the outdoors but also because they are economically useful in the control of insects that damage agricultural crops, according to a recent report issued by the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of the Interior.

Although their esthetic and recreational worth constitutes, perhaps, their greatest value to mankind, birds have also tremendous economic potentialities to which consideration must be given, according to the report. Written by Dr. Clarence Cottam and Francis M. Uhler, biologists of the Survey's Section of Food Habits, Division of Wildlife Research, the report has been issued as a mimeographed leaflet, BS-162, entitled "Birds as a Factor in Controlling Insect Depredations." The leaflet is available to the public upon request.

Probably more than half the food of the 1,400 species and varieties of North American birds consists of insects, the report declared. The greatest value of birds in the role of insect destroyers lies in the coordination of their feeding activities with all the natural factors of the environment in preventing the development of destructive insect eruptions to plague proportions.

No claim is made, however, that birds can completely control insect infestations. As a control agency, the report explains, birds are not wholly effective as they do not kill all the pests, but the same is true of every other control measure, biological or artificial.

Explaining that birds have a high rate of metabolism, or energy consumption, which gives birds an impressive consuming capacity, the report asserts that a bird may destroy more insects at a single feeding than individual parasites destroy in a lifetime.

The value of birds as insect destroyers is enhanced by the fact that the feathered creatures are highly mobile and move quickly from one infested area to another.

The sea gull-cricket episode of Salt Lake Valley in 1848, which saved the lives of the early Mormon pioneers, is cited as a conspicuous example of effective control by birds of a serious insect pest. In memory to the California gulls that saved the Mormon pioneers from the cricket plague, a Sea Gull Monument was erected in Salt Lake City at a cost of more than \$40,000.

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